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Patent Application for:

HUB PAGES FOR SET TOP BOX STARTUP SCREEN

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7 **HUB PAGES FOR SET TOP BOX STARTUP SCREEN**
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10 **FIELD OF THE INVENTION**

11 This invention relates generally to the field of electronic programming guides
12 (EPGs). More particularly, certain embodiments of this invention are related to an
13 EPG with a customized startup screen.
14

15 **BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION**

16 Cable television (TV) systems often provide a channel that is used for
17 displaying an electronic programming guide (EPG). The EPG provides a listing of
18 the programs that are available on the cable system. Typically, the listing includes
19 a plurality of time slots arranged in a column, wherein each time slot has
20 associated with it a row of program information to thus form a grid pattern. The
21 program information may include, for example, the name of the program, the cable
22 channel on which the program may be found, names of actors, whether the
23 program is broadcast in stereo, whether closed captioning is available and other
24 associated information.

25 In many cable systems, a programming language such as Hypertext Markup
26 Language (HTML) is used to format the EPG. This enables applications that are
27 suited for viewing pages of the World Wide Web, such as web browsers that use
28 Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP), to display the EPG. Use of HTML enables the
29 use of hyperlinks that may be selected by users to access desired Web pages. For

1 example, users are able to shop, make purchases, conduct banking and other
2 financial transactions, play games, conduct research and access vast amounts of
3 information by selecting a desired hyperlink. As a result, such HTML based EPGs
4 provide access not only to the subject matter that is available from cable systems,
5 but also provide access to the subject matter that is available from the Web.

6 Unfortunately, there exists an enormous amount of content available to users
7 of cable and satellite TV set top boxes these days, with the amount increasing
8 constantly. It becomes difficult for the user to access only the desired content
9 without navigation through numerous menus and pages to access the information
10 desired. Typically, a user of a regular portal site has to surf through layers of pages
11 to access desired information.

12 Through technological advancements such as fiber optics and others, the
13 data carrying capacity, or bandwidth, of cable systems continues to rapidly
14 increase. This enables much more information to be transmitted, from more
15 sources, over that which was possible just a short time ago. As such, it is
16 desirable that EPGs be provided that are capable of displaying additional
17 information in a user configurable manner that facilitates personalized human
18 interaction with TVs and cable systems.

19 20 21 **SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION**

22 The present invention relates generally to an Electronic Programming Guide.
23 Objects, advantages and features of the invention will become apparent to those
24 skilled in the art upon consideration of the following detailed description of the
25 invention.

26 In one embodiment of the present invention, a method of generating a
27 customized startup page for an Electronic Programming Guide (EPG) is provided.
28 A user establishes a user profile including preferences and location information that
29 is stored in a database at an EPG server. Upon receipt of a request from a Set Top

1 Box (STB) the EPG server invokes a HUB generator program that generates a
2 custom startup page for the EPG based upon the user profile.

3 A method, consistent with certain embodiments of the present invention, of
4 providing a customized startup page for an Electronic Program Guide, includes:
5 receiving a request for the startup page from a Set Top Box associated with a user;
6 finding a user profile corresponding to the user in a user database; generating a
7 link to content based upon the user profile; and generating the startup page
8 comprising at least the link to content.

9 An apparatus for generating an Electronic Program Guide startup Hub page
10 for a Set Top Box, consistent with embodiments of the present invention, includes
11 a mechanism for receiving an HTTP request from the Set Top Box. A user
12 database stores a user profile. A Hub generating program receives the HTTP
13 request and generates a query of the user database to retrieve the user profile from
14 the user database. The Hub generating program generates a query of a site
15 database for information associated with the user profile. The Hub generating
16 program generates a Hub page by populating an HTML document with the
17 information.

18 The above summaries are intended to illustrate exemplary embodiments of
19 the invention, which will be best understood in conjunction with the detailed
20 description to follow, and are not intended to limit the scope of the appended
21 claims.

22 23 **BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS**

24 The features of the invention believed to be novel are set forth with
25 particularity in the appended claims. The invention itself however, both as to
26 organization and method of operation, together with objects and advantages
27 thereof, may be best understood by reference to the following detailed description
28 of the invention, which describes certain exemplary embodiments of the invention,
29 taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings in which:

30 **FIGURE 1** is an exemplary block diagram of an interactive cable TV system.

FIGURE 2 is an exemplary block diagram of a HUB generator system consistent with the present invention.

FIGURE 3 is an illustrative Electronic Programming Guide for news.

FIGURE 4 is an illustrative Electronic Programming Guide for sports.

FIGURE 5 is an illustrative Electronic Programming Guide for special events.

FIGURE 6 is a flow chart illustrating one process of generating custom startup pages consistent with embodiments of the present invention.

FIGURE 7 is a flow chart depicting one process for establishing the user's startup Hub pages consistent with embodiments of the present invention.

FIGURE 8 is a flow chart illustrating one process carried out in the Hub generator program 130 for assembling a startup Hub page.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

While this invention is susceptible of embodiment in many different forms, there is shown in the drawings and will herein be described in detail specific embodiments, with the understanding that the present disclosure is to be considered as an example of the principles of the invention and not intended to limit the invention to the specific embodiments shown and described. In the description below, like reference numerals are used to describe the same, similar or corresponding parts in the several views of the drawings.

In the following description, numerous details are set forth in order to provide a thorough understanding of the present invention. However, it will be apparent to one of ordinary skill in the art that these specific details are not required in order to practice the present invention. In addition, well known electrical structures and circuits are shown in block diagram form and not described in detail in order so as to not unnecessarily obscure the present invention. Additionally, although the present invention is described in connection with an interactive cable system, it is understood that this invention is applicable to other systems wherein electronic programming guides (EPGs) are used.

1 Referring to **FIGURE 1**, a block diagram for an exemplary interactive cable
2 television (TV) system 10 is shown. The system 10 includes a media server 12 for
3 providing, on demand, movies and other programming obtained from a media
4 database 14. The media server 12 might also provide additional content such as
5 interviews with the actors, games, advertisements, available merchandise,
6 associated Web pages, interactive games and other related content. The system
7 10 also includes an electronic programming guide (EPG) server 16 and a program
8 listing database 18 for generating an EPG as will be described.

9 The media server 12 and EPG server 16 are coupled by a transmission
10 medium 20 to a set top box (STB) 22. The transmission medium 20 may include
11 a conventional coaxial cable network, a fiber optic cable network, telephone
12 system, a satellite communication system, a radio frequency (RF) system, a
13 microwave system, other wireless systems, a combination of wired and wireless
14 systems or any of a variety of known electronic transmission mediums.

15 The exemplary system 10 further includes a TV 24, such as a digital
16 television, having a display 26 for displaying an EPG. The STB 22 may be coupled
17 to the TV 24 and various other audio/visual devices 26 and Internet Appliances 28
18 by an appropriate interface 30, which can be any suitable analog or digital
19 interface. In one embodiment, interface 30 conforms to an interface standard such
20 as the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) 1394 standard. The
21 STB 22 may include a central processing unit (CPU) 32 and memory 33 such as
22 Random Access Memory (RAM), Read Only Memory (ROM), flash memory, mass
23 storage such as a hard disc drive, or other electronic storage media, etc. Such
24 memory and storage media is suitable for storing data as well as programmed
25 processes for execution on the CPU 32. STB 22 may include circuitry suitable for
26 audio decoding and processing, the decoding of video data compressed in
27 accordance with a compression standard such as the Motion Pictures Experts
28 Group (MPEG) standard and other processing to form a controller or central hub.
29 Alternatively, components of the STB 22 may be incorporated into the TV 24 itself,

1 thus eliminating the STB 22. Further, a computer having a tuner device may be
2 substituted for the TV 24 and STB 22.

3 By way of example, the STB 22 may be coupled to devices such as a
4 personal computer, video cassette recorder, camcorder, digital camera, personal
5 digital assistant and other audio/visual or internet related devices. In addition, a
6 data transport architecture, such as that set forth by an industry group which
7 includes Sony Corporation and known as the Home Audio-Video Interoperability
8 (HAVi) architecture may be utilized to enable interoperability among devices on a
9 network regardless of the manufacturer of the device. This forms a home network
10 system wherein electronic devices and Internet appliances are compatible with
11 each other. Further, the STB 22 runs an operating system suitable for a home
12 network system such as Sony Corporation's AperiOS™ real time operating system.
13 Of course, other operating systems could also be used.

14 The STB 22 includes an infrared (IR) receiver 34 for receiving IR signals from
15 an input device such as remote control 36. Alternatively, it is noted that many other
16 communication methods may be utilized, such as wired or wireless control, radio
17 frequency, etc. In addition, it can be readily appreciated that the input device 36
18 may be any device suitable for controlling the STB 22 such as a remote control,
19 personal digital assistant, laptop computer, keyboard or computer mouse. In
20 addition, the input device 36 may be a control panel located on the TV 24 or the
21 STB 22.

22 The STB 22 may also be coupled to an independent service provider (ISP)
23 host 38 a connection 40 to thus provide access to services on the Internet. The ISP
24 host 38 provides various content to the user that is obtained from a content
25 database 42. STB 22 may also be used as an Internet access device to obtain
26 information and content from the Internet.

27 An EPG for depicting programming information and other content is
28 generally accessed by selecting a hyperlink from an HTML document. A computer
29 program which resides at the EPG server 16 then generates an EPG page
30 including a grid table having a plurality of table cells representing programming.

1 The server side computer programs may be implemented in C++, Open Data Base
2 Connectivity (ODBC) and Microsoft Foundation Class (MFC) programming
3 languages, although other suitable languages may be used. The computer
4 program then connects to the program listing database 18 in order to associate
5 selected TV programming information such as available programs, time slots,
6 channel numbers, etc. with selected table cells to form an HTML based EPG
7 having hyperlinks to more detailed programming information. The EPG can then
8 be displayed by a Web browser which preferably supports HTML version 4.0 or
9 higher and cascading style sheets (CSS). EPGs in use today which are based on
10 HTML typically use an input device, such as remote control 36, to access
11 programming through the EPG.

12 In accordance with the present invention, a "Hub" startup page is generated
13 according to a user's profile including location, preferences, etc. in order to permit
14 the user to access his or her most frequently desired programming and content.
15 This Hub page is delivered to the user at the time of turning on the television or STB
16 to permit immediate access to content through this custom profiled page.

17 Referring now to **FIGURE 2**, set top 22 includes a web browser 110 that
18 sends requests, such as HTTP formatted requests 120, to a HUB generator
19 program 130 situated on the EPG server 16. HUB generator program 130 may be,
20 for example, written as a JAVA program. HUB generator program 130 replies to
21 the request 120 with a HUB page (a customized HTML startup document) 140 that
22 is displayed as a custom formatted EPG on the display 26. HUB generator
23 program 130 generates the HUB page in accordance with a stored user profile
24 containing information about user preferences, location, etc. The user selects what
25 type of HUB startup page is displayed so that navigation to favorite programming
26 and web content can be simplified. Any number of categories of startup page
27 templates can be used (e.g. Home, Sports, News, Children, etc.) as starting points
28 for building a custom Hub page.

29 When the request 120 is received by the HUB generator program 130 of
30 EPG server 16, a query 150 is generated to identify the user profile, location,

1 preferences, etc. for the HTTP request 120. The query 150 is processed against
2 a user database 160 containing user preferences, which returns the information
3 required to profile the user at 165. Query links 170 are generated as a result of the
4 query 150 and processed against one or more site databases 174, 178 through 180
5 (A-C) to produce query results 190 which are returned to the HUB generator
6 program 130. Site databases may be periodically updated as necessary in any
7 suitable manner to provide the appropriate content or links used in generating the
8 Hub page. For example, Site database 180 may contain weather information which
9 is periodically updated by making periodic queries 192 through the Internet 194 (or
10 by any other suitable connection) to a remote server 198 (e.g, a weather service
11 site). In this example, the server may provide weather information based upon the
12 zip code, area code, city name, etc. contained in the user profile for areas served
13 by the EPG server 16. Moreover, the query link 170 may, in some embodiments,
14 directly query web sites stored on remote servers such as 198 through the Internet
15 194 to obtain the needed information. Multiple site databases may be used to store
16 multiple links and content associated with various types of information that may be
17 supplied to the user through the startup page. In other embodiments, information
18 may be periodically updated through any suitable site serving as a source of
19 information via the Internet.

20 HUB generator program 130 takes the query results 190 and generates a
21 customized HUB page 140 that is returned to the STB 22's web browser 110. This
22 permits the user to access a customized startup HUB that provides shortcuts to the
23 information specifically desired by the user when the television system is turned on.
24 This process will be described in greater detail later.

25 Referring now to **FIGURE 3**, an exemplary news oriented EPG HUB 300 is
26 illustrated. In this embodiment, a horizontally oriented grid table 306 includes a
27 number of program cells configured as menu selection tabs (icons) 310. In this
28 embodiment, menu selections for web sites as well as television programs are
29 illustrated. In this embodiment, selection tabs (icons) 310 can be scrolled right or
30 left by actuating right arrow icon 314 or left arrow icon 318 to reveal other

selectable tabs 310 representing cells in the grid table. These tabs 310 represent user selected links to favorite news item locations, either being television programming, Internet web sites or other content. News items may be selected for display on the Hub page based on the type of news a viewer is particularly interested in (e.g., domestic, international, food, finance, state, local, etc.) In a lower region 324 of EPG HUB 300, stock market indices are displayed. Such indices may be updated by reference to a remote server on the Internet, for example. In certain embodiments, information such as stock market indices may be used as links to further information. Various menu selections for navigation to other pages is provided in region 330, and the current (e.g. default or most recently tuned) television channel programming appears in a live video window 340 in this embodiment. Other arrangements of similar information can also be used without departing from the invention.

Referring to **FIGURE 4**, sports EPG HUB 400 is shown for depicting sports information. The sports EPG HUB 400 includes a sports scores grid table 408 that depicts, for example, the final scores of college basketball games held recently for teams of interest to, and selected by the user. These scores are then retrieved from an appropriate server via the Internet, for example, to provide the user with the latest information. The sports EPG HUB 400 also includes a sports programming grid table 412 which depicts selected Web sites and programming in the form of selection tabs (icons) 420 that may be selected by the user to launch a web site or television program. Additional tabs 420 can be revealed by selection of right arrow icon 314 or left arrow icon 318. In the embodiment shown, the sports scores grid table 408 automatically scrolls vertically to reveal additional scores. Again, other menu selections are provided as 330 and live video of a favorite default program or last tuned channel is shown in live video window 340. Other arrangements are also possible.

Referring to **FIGURE 5**, another EPG HUB 500, a Home Hub, is shown for depicting an arrangement for providing information relating a user's (subscriber's) home location. By way of example, special events, special programming, and

1 other topics of local interest can be displayed. The Home EPG HUB 500, in this
2 example, includes an icon 508 on the EPG that depicts, for example, a link to
3 information relating to a special event being promoted that are of interest to the
4 user based on a user profile. Local events such as festivals, concerts, film
5 festivals, special TV programming, etc. can be showcased in region 508. EPG
6 HUB 500 also shows a weather grid table 512 which briefly depicts the weather
7 forecast for the next several days. These weather forecasts may be presented in
8 a shorthand graphical summary and may take the form of selection tabs (icons)
9 520 that may be selected by the user to access more detailed weather information.
10 The weather forecast information and local interest information are based upon the
11 user's profile location information identifying the location of the user, and can be
12 obtained by accessing an appropriate weather server on the Internet, for example.
13 Other arrangements are also possible.

14 With reference to **FIGURE 6**, the process for creating the customized HUB
15 for use as the EPG startup page is illustrated as process 600. The process can be
16 broken into two distinct stages. The first stage 610 describes establishing the user
17 profile, which can be done upon initial use of the Set Top Box 22, or can be entered
18 to reconfigure the user profile at any time the user desires. This first stage is
19 described in greater detail in connection with **FIGURE 7**. The second stage 620
20 describes generation of the startup page and is described in greater detail in
21 connection with **FIGURE 8**.

22 With reference to **FIGURE 6**, upon first powering up the STB 22, or
23 subsequent reset or if the user desires to change the user profile, the process
24 starts at 625 with the user preparing a profile at 630. This can be accomplished by
25 any suitable process such as selections from a menu, filling out form information,
26 or providing key words, etc. The profile preferably also includes location
27 information (which can be derived from zip code, city and state, or telephone
28 number information in the user profile). The user profile is sent to the EPG server
29 16 at 635. The user profile is stored at the EPG server 16 in user database 160
30 until needed.

1 Whenever selected by the user, or upon startup of the STB 22 or television
2 24, the web browser 110 of the STB 22 sends HTTP request 120 to the EPG server
3 16. Upon detecting arrival of a request at 645, the HUB generator program 130
4 queries the user database 160 at 650 to obtain the profile information needed to set
5 up the startup page. The user profile is linked to site databases such as 174, 178
6 and 180 as well as possibly to remote Servers containing data such as 198 via the
7 Internet, to determine appropriate links and/or content to return as part of the
8 startup EPG at 655. The appropriate links are returned to the HUB generator
9 program at 660 and the HUB generator program assembles the Hub startup page
10 at 665. This startup page is then sent, at 670, to the STB for display on display 26
11 and use by the user. Process 620 then awaits the next request at 645.

12 Referring now to **FIGURE 7**, a process for establishing a user profile for
13 generation of a Hub page is illustrated as 700. The process starts at 704 with
14 initialization of the STB 22 at 710 upon initial power up of the STB 22. As a part of
15 the initialization process, the user provides profile information at 714 as part of the
16 registration process. This is accomplished by making selections of desired
17 interests, default Hub page template as well as personal information (e.g. age, sex,
18 hobbies, preferences, viewing habits, etc.) that can be used to select default
19 content. The Hub generator program 130 generates and saves a default Hub page
20 format at 718 based upon the user profile and the populated Hub page is sent to
21 the Set Top Box 22's browser 110 at 722. If the user is happy with this default Hub
22 page at 726, no action is required to keep it for future use. If, however, the user
23 desires to modify the default page at 722, a modification process 730 is entered
24 which allows the user to customize the page by adding or deleting links in greater
25 detail and otherwise reconfigure the Hub page. Once the modification is complete
26 at 730, the modified page is saved as a template for the new Hub page at 740.
27 Many variations of this process are possible without departing from the invention.

28 With reference to **FIGURE 8**, a more detailed process 800 is described for
29 generation of the Hub page at Hub generator program 130. This process starts at
30 804. At 810, the process awaits a receipt of an HTTP request 120 from web

1 browser 110 for a startup Hub page. In accordance with the preferred embodiment,
2 when such a request is received, the Hub generator program loads an Enterprise
3 Java Bean (EJB) at 814 representing a table in the user database 160 and calls the
4 EJB to identify the information relating to the user's particular profile. Based upon
5 this profile, the Hub generator program generates one or more queries 170 to local
6 and/or remote databases at 818. The local and/or remote databases return links,
7 images, content, etc. as required in accordance with the queries 170 at 822. This
8 information is used to populate the stored Hub page template corresponding to the
9 user profile at 826 to create the startup Hub page. This Hub page is then sent to
10 the web browser 110 of STB 22 at 830 and the process returns to 810 to await the
11 next query. Of course, many variations in this process are possible without
12 departing from the invention.

13 Those skilled in the art will recognize that the present invention has been
14 described in terms of exemplary embodiments based upon use of a set top box
15 containing a programmed processor such as a RISC (Reduced Instruction Set
16 Computer). However, the invention should not be so limited, since the present
17 invention could be implemented using hardware component equivalents such as
18 special purpose hardware and/or dedicated processors which are equivalents to
19 the invention as described and claimed. Similarly, general purpose computers,
20 microprocessor based computers, micro-controllers, optical computers, analog
21 computers, dedicated processors and/or dedicated hard wired logic may be used
22 to construct alternative equivalent embodiments of the present invention.

23 Those skilled in the art will appreciate that the program steps used to
24 implement the embodiments described above can be implemented using disc
25 storage as well as other forms of storage including Read Only Memory (ROM)
26 devices, Random Access Memory (RAM) devices; optical storage elements,
27 magnetic storage elements, magneto-optical storage elements, flash memory, core
28 memory and/or other equivalent storage technologies without departing from the
29 present invention. Such alternative storage devices should be considered
30 equivalents.